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ABSTRACT

The Baltimore City (Maryland) Public Schools (BCPSs) established the Institute for Middle School Reform at the end of 1991-92 to create an administrative vehicle for systemic middle grades reform. The Institute's mission is to provide each individual middle school community with data-driven planning, implementation, and evaluation tools and technical assistance to deliver holistic, informed, and flexible approaches for improving outcomes for each child in the system. The city context for the Institute includes an environment where many school reform programs and innovative initiatives are already in place, such as private sector participation, state funding in challenge grants to 12 Baltimore middle schools, and local public-private school partnerships. The BCPSs have committed themselves to four specific Efficacy Institute outcomes for all graduating students, a program of staff development and curriculum developed at the Mid-Continent Regional Laboratory. The Institute plans a multi-faceted strategy to involve all schools in improvement efforts while providing attention and resources to 18 schools in greatest need of reform. Tier I will provide a foundation of support for all schools; Tier II will offer a school-based assessment and planning process; and Tier III is the Challenge schools. (Contains 19 notes.) (JB)

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THE BALTIMORE CITY INSTITUTE FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL REFORM:

Mobilizing for Districtwide Middle Grades Innovation

Prepared for

Edna McConnell Clark Foundation

Program for Disadvantaged Youth

by

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The Baltimore City Institute for Middle School Reform:

Mobilizing for Districtwide Middle Grades Innovation

School reform over the last decade has had special meaning in the nation's middle grades schools. In the early part of the decade, two organizations, the National Middle School Association, a professional association of member middle schools, and the Center for Early Adolescence, a university-based non-profit organization offering technical assistance to schools and organizations serving young adolescents, were virtually alone in leading the reshaping of these schools. By the close of the decade, however, several major foundations, including the Lilly Endowment, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, had developed major initiatives that focus wider attention on the need for reform at this level.

Although increased awareness of the needs of young adolescents has resulted in changes in individual schools, reform encompassing all middle-level schools within a single district, especially in urban areas, remains a challenge. However, recent developments in one urban district, Baltimore City Public Schools, suggest the potential for a more comprehensive strategy to reform all of the district's middle grades schools, including 24 middle schools housing sixth through eighth grades, six kindergarten-through-eighth grade schools, and one special education school. Since 1992, Baltimore's Institute for Middle School Reform has been the vehicle for spearheading a set of

activities tailored to effect systemic middle grades reforms in these schools.

Background

Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) established the Institute for Middle School Reform at the end of the 1991-92 school year with the intention of creating an administrative vehicle for systemic middle grades reform in all Baltimore schools containing grades six, seven, and eight. The Institute's mission is "to provide each individual middle school community with data-driven planning, implementation, and evaluation tools and technical assistance that will enable school personnel and others in the school community to deliver holistic, informed and flexible approaches for improving the outcomes of each child."[1] The Institute proposes a range of activities to realize this mission including:

- Identifying and adapting elements of effective schools research and other promising middle grades-specific models as a framework for other program activities.
- Implementing school-based assessment activities that engage schools in using school-specific data in planning for improvement and evaluating progress.
- Disseminating information about models of change to each school.
- Providing technical assistance, on-site support, and comprehensive evaluation to each school.

Why the middle grades? Mrs. Willie Foster, until recently the Institute's Director, points out it was hardly a difficult choice to focus on schools for young adolescents. "We looked at

the data, and the need was obvious," she says. "We know our kids drop out in ninth grade. We also know our principals complain about class size, and teachers struggle with student management, lack of progress for kids." She adds:

> We know what we need. We need competent teachers who want to work with young adolescents. We need parents who are active and involved. We need kids who know what it means to be in school. This is not unique to Baltimore. We're no different from other urban districts.

What may be unique, however, is the coherence of the district's approach to change in its middle grades schools. As Dr. Lillian Gonzalez, Deputy Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction observes, "Middle school reform has been the stepchild of the reform movement. We have pockets of excellence in Baltimore's middle grades, but these have not been disseminated or replicated systemwide." In discussion and planning stages since spring of 1992, the Institute is the organizational strategy that district leadership has developed for taking excellence citywide and mobilizing available resources for reforming education for young adolescents. It begins its first official year of operations on July 1, 1993.

Context for A District-Generated Institute for Middle School Reform

The Baltimore City Institute for Middle School Reform, like school reform innovations elsewhere, is emerging within a broader citywide context. In Baltimore, this context includes a movement toward increased delegation of decision-making responsibility to school-level staff, evolving alternatives to traditional practice

at individual schools, and educational policy reforms developed at the Maryland Department of Education. It also reflects significant participation of the private sector through the presence of Channel One in all schools, the contracting with a private corporation, Education Alternatives, Inc., to manage one middle school, and recommendations adopted from a 1992 management study of district operations. In addition, major foundations, universities, and community-based organizations with a multi-year presence in the district have all planted seeds of reform at individual middle schools over the past five years and have an interest in policies that would institutionalize these reforms. The competing ideologies represented by each of these factors and potential contributions of each establish an intriguing context for a campaign geared to meeting new goals for middle grades students in Baltimore City Public Schools.

- New Leadership With a Commitment to the Middle Grades

Pressures for reform originating outside the district are converging at a time when recently-appointed district leadership comes on board with compatible goals and a willingness both to collaborate with other entities and to direct resources of its own toward reform of middle schools. As Foster explains, "We needed supportive people harnessed to a structure that allowed schools to plan for change. Now we have leadership we didn't have before."

Indeed, Baltimore Superintendent Dr. Walter Amprey and Deputy Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Lillian Gonzalez have been in the district only since 1991. Likewise, Dr. Patricia White, Assistant Superintendent for Professional Development, Organizational Development, and Attitudinal Change, and Dr. Maurice Howard, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, have been on board only since 1992. All play critical roles in the Institute's organization and have specific responsibilities for making it a vehicle for mobilizing both existing and new resources available for middle grades reform.

Fresh leadership in the district's regional offices also bodes well for the Institute. Since the arrival of Dr. Amprey as Superintendent, the district has reorganized into six regions, each with a new administrator responsible for some 30 schools. According to one long-time observer who has had the opportunity to meet with most of these administrators:

> It turns out that at least three are very talented, energetic, eager for change, and very motivating of principals who want to make change.... These are talented folks Central Office can call upon. There's no reason these six people can't play a role of brokering resources, helping schools learn from each other, and sustaining motivation and energy.

Others mention the way in which the decentralization of the district into smaller regions allows administrators to bring a few schools together at one time to discuss mutual interests and concerns. As one participant points out:

> Compared to a huge urban district, there are relatively few middle schools in the system. When you break these down into four or five per region, the potential for correction is high. Middle school reform is really manageable, and problems are solvable here.

The appointment of new staff in leadership roles combined with a structure that invites problem-solving and dissemination of successful practices sets the stage for broader middle grades reform. With new leadership comes new energy and commitment unfettered by old loyalties, and several observers believe that stated commitment to middle level reform is more than just rhetoric. "The Superintendent is talking about the Institute on call-in talk radio," reports one observer. "That means that middle schools are on his mind as an area that needs attention. The Institute is the vehicle for taking some action, and it's owned by leadership at the top."

- State-level Policy Context

Baltimore's Middle School Reform Institute is developing within a broader context of recently-enacted state education reforms. In particular, the State Board of Education has established ten goals for student achievement, and in 1992 the legislature authorized the establishment of Maryland's Schools for Success Fund, which provides grants for low-performance schools to achieve these goals. In turn, these goals and an accompanying set of objectives that shape the assessment of achievement for eighth graders frame the Baltimore-specific initiative.

Expected Outcomes for All Maryland Students

Goals established at the state level offer a context for district-level reforms in all grades, including in middle schools. In Maryland, these goals expect that by the year 2000:

1. 95% of Maryland's students will start first grade ready to learn as demonstrated by readiness assessments;
2. Maryland will rank in the top five states in the nation on national and international comparisons of student achievement and other measures of student success;
3. 100% of Maryland's students will be functionally literate in reading, writing, mathematics, and citizenship;
4. 95% of Maryland's students will achieve satisfactory levels of achievement in mathematics, science, reading, social studies, and writing-language arts on State-developed assessment measures;
5. 50% of Maryland's students will achieve excellence levels in mathematics, science, reading, social studies, and writing-language arts on State-developed assessment measures;
6. the number of Maryland students pursuing postsecondary studies in mathematics, science, and technology will increase by 50%;
7. 95% of Maryland's students will achieve a high school diploma and will be prepared for postsecondary education, employment, or both;
8. 90% of Maryland's students who drop out of school will secure a high school diploma by age 25;
9. 100% of Maryland's citizens will be literate; and
10. Maryland schools will be free of drugs and alcohol and will provide a safe environment conducive to learning.

Within this framework of goals, the Department of Education has set standards for attendance, dropout rates, functional test scores, and grade promotions for all schools. In addition, the

state's Performance Assessment Plan identifies expected performance outcomes for eighth grade proficiency in mathematics, reading, writing and language usage, social studies, and science. In an effort to enforce school accountability for reaching these standards and outcomes, in May 1993, the Department proposed regulations that would allow the state to make changes in the management of schools that do not show progress in meeting state standards and require districts to pay for the services of any third party called in to improve schools. These regulations could take effect by early in 1994, and eventually, they would apply to performance outcomes as well.[2] Together, the state's set of standards and expected outcomes coupled with the threat of state intervention in schools where large numbers of students fail to meet these outcomes trigger a sense of urgency for reform and create a rationale for the activities of Baltimore's Middle School Reform Institute.

State Funding and Assistance for Low-Performing Schools

As part of a larger legislative package that also authorizes the state to release "report cards" focusing on how well each school is meeting state standards, the State Department of Education has made 15 million dollars in "Challenge Grants" available to schools with low percentages of average daily attendance, poor performance on Maryland Functional Tests and Criterion Referenced Tests, and high dropout rates. Twenty-seven schools in Maryland are designated "Challenge Schools," twelve of which are Baltimore middle schools. Schools are to use Challenge

Grants to effect systemic changes in these schools according to a plan designed by a school-based improvement team made up at a minimum of teachers, parents, and central office personnel. This plan must establish outcomes, measures for these outcomes, and timelines for improvement with full implementation of changes to occur by the fiscal year 1994.[3]

Challenge Schools operate on the basis of a written agreement between the state superintendent and the local superintendent. Because leadership is vital to the success of a school, the state superintendent and local superintendent must agree on the administrative leadership of each school. Enabling legislation also allows for contracts with outside public institutions or agencies, community groups, or private corporations or institutions for operation of some schools. The State distributes funds directly to individual schools according to needs they identify in school improvement plans.

When schools voluntarily agree to become Challenge Schools, they also enter into an active partnership with both the Maryland State Department of Education and the local school district. This partnership ensures that schools will receive critical help in capacity building, including a school review team to conduct an on-site evaluation, technical assistance, and on-going needs-driven staff development. In addition, the state superintendent in consultation with the local superintendent may select an outside consultant "with experience in 'turning schools

around'" to assess each school plan to assure that it will bring about desired results.[4]

"The unique feature of the Challenge School Program is that it is a school empowerment, school decision-making program," Dr. Jodellano Statom, Director of the Maryland Performance Assessment Program, explains. To expand schools' capacity for real reform and school-site empowerment, Maryland's Department of Education links each to sources of technical assistance and has contracted with Seymour Fliegel of the Center for Educational Innovation (CEI), a project of the Manhattan Institute, for this purpose. Fliegel, former Deputy Superintendent in New York City Public Schools and an architect of the East Harlem/District 4 schools of choice program, has begun work with Challenge Schools, a few at a time, as they prepare school-based plans for reform. The state also lends facilitators trained in school change to school improvement teams to help them translate school-specific data into instructional priorities, with facilitators assigned to work with each school up to 50% of their time between May and July, 1993, and available to provide on-going assistance through 1995. Plans designed at the school level will shape the budget needed to implement whatever program is developed, whether that consists of staff retreats, school-parent-community collaborations, professional development, tutoring, or conflict resolution.

Under the Challenge School Grant Program, the Baltimore City Public Schools will receive up to 12 million dollars annually.

The State Department will apportion this grant money through fiscal year 1995 to the four elementary and 12 middle schools to implement specific strategies for achieving expected outcomes. Notes Statom:

> The money is flexible. All you have to do is to show that you will use it to assist your school in reaching state data-based standards or other effective schools criteria. But this money must go for school-based, not district, change. It flows from school plans. These dollars can not be used to support the Middle Schools Institute per se.

Statom defines the Challenge School Grant Program as a change process, not an administrative structure. Because the State is targeting the lowest-performing schools for funding, the process ensures that resources will reach those schools in most desperate need of change. Between 1990-1995, the Maryland Department of Education expects these schools to show significant growth - "that which could not have occurred by chance alone," according to Statom - in areas it defines as indicators of effectiveness.

With the Challenge Schools Program, certain Baltimore schools receive meaningful support for change in exchange for participating in an extended external review process to help them meet satisfactory outcome standards for all students. Resources include not only ample funding for innovation in low-performing schools but also continuous technical assistance to targeted schools through June 30, 1995. These benefits offer the district and specific schools clear incentives to collaborate with the

state. At the same time, the relationship the schools develop with the state and external change-agents opens their organizational boundaries to influences that expose them to innovative instructional strategies and community resources to improve student outcomes.[5]

- Foundation Funding from Local and National Sources

Within Baltimore, several foundations provide funding for activities in the city's schools, including middle schools. In addition, since 1989, a national foundation has provided grants to the school system to stimulate and learn from reforms in two middle schools serving large numbers of disadvantaged youth. Together these foundations have supported a set of programs that establish a starting point for middle school reform in the district.

Like many cities, Baltimore City Public Schools benefit from the presence of a foundation specifically established to support public education. Among the initiatives of Baltimore's Fund for Educational Excellence, several support middle schools in particular. One, developed in collaboration with Johns Hopkins, is the TIPS Program (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork), which builds parent-teacher partnerships through homework activities in all subjects. A second, the Family-School Partnership program, involves a selected group of middle schools in exploring six areas of family involvement in schools. With an emphasis on staff development, the Fund also supports teachers at

each school who design approaches that cut across all six areas and fosters colloquia to help schools share the strategies they develop. The Fund also offers mini-grants to school improvement teams to increase teacher effectiveness, especially through improved collegial relationships.

Jerry Baum, Director of the Fund, emphasizes that the Fund promotes changes in public education, especially in teacher effectiveness, through building coalitions among a wide variety of community organizations and serving as a clearinghouse for new ideas so that teachers themselves can become spokespeople for school reform. Baum sees this work as parallel to that contemplated by the Middle School Reform Institute. "Increasingly we will focus our initiatives to facilitate school change," he says.

Also active in promoting school reform in Baltimore is the Abell Foundation, ranking in asset size among the country's top two percent of independent foundations.[6] With a spirit of experimentation, the Foundation, headed by Robert C. Embry, Jr. who is also Chairman of the Maryland State Board of Education, targets resources to programs designed to improve schooling for students in Baltimore, including those in the middle grades. For example, over the past several years, the Foundation has supported five projects at Johns Hopkins designed to strengthen instruction in public schools, including the Student Team Reading/Student Team Writing (STR/STW) cooperative learning model

and Success for All, a program that has had success at the elementary level and is now being piloted at the middle level. The Foundation also supports community-based organizations to work in the middle schools, sponsoring programs as diverse as peer mentoring, community mentoring, a lacrosse league with student participation tied to grades and attendance, academic competitions for middle school teams, Outward Bound leadership training for students, and the "Gold Card" program of attendance incentives. In addition, the Foundation has provided incentives to schools and institutions outside of the Baltimore City district to join with individual Baltimore schools to improve curriculum and instruction.

A third source of foundation support for Baltimore middle schools since 1989 has been the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, a national foundation with signficant resources directed toward middle school reform in five urban school districts, including Baltimore. In BCPS, the Foundation has sought to encourage systemic middle school reform through grants which the school system used to support innovation at two middle schools, West Baltimore and Calverton. Over a four-year period, these schools have identified lessons applicable to systemic change including those related to working with a foundation, being a pilot school, and working with the school system to accomplish change. Schools have also identified lessons related to goals specified by the Foundation in the area of school completion, student self-esteem, and student awareness of post-secondary opportunities along with

useful skills and abilities for teachers who serve in change implementer roles.[7]

With Foundation support, these schools have adopted teacher teaming, flexible scheduling, and advisory programs and have implemented both new instructional strategies, such as STR/STW and Math with Meaning, and staff development programs. As pioneers of innovative practice, these schools are in a position to inspire reform in other middle schools, and, in fact, the time-limited nature of the Foundation's involvement may put some pressure on the district to disseminate promising practices that have evolved in the two "Clark schools," to all middle schools. As a beginning step in this process, on the basis of their experiences, these schools are in the planning stages of developing a manual on "teaming" for distribution to other schools.

- Reforms and the Private Sector

Over the past several years, Baltimore has become known as a laboratory for incorporating a number of private-sector resources and public-private collaboratives into its operations. Together these comprise a set of initiatives that introduce a kind of "mixed economy" into the range of schooling alternatives for middle grades students in the district. Just as each strategy offers evidence of promising practices, each represents a source of ideas that the Institute could disseminate to all schools to stimulate reforms in teaching and learning.

Education Alternatives, Inc.

Perhaps the most widely-known of Baltimore's private-sector initiatives is the district's 134-million-dollar, five-year contract with Education Alternatives, Inc. (E.A.I.), a Minneapolis-based, for-profit corporation, for management of nine Baltimore schools, including one middle school, Harlem Park. This contract allows E.A.I. to manage and implement a combination of practices commonly accepted as effective teaching and learning strategies but packaged by E.A.I. under its "Tesseract" trademark. The company embarked on its Baltimore project in September 1992 at the invitation of Superintendent Dr. Walter Amprey.

During the early months of operations, several reports suggested that the transfer of authority to E.A.I. had been less than smooth. For example, although the Baltimore Teachers Union had endorsed the E.A.I. contract, teacher dissatisfaction surfaced in September and persisted at mid-year.[8] Parents at Harlem Park also voiced early complaints that E.A.I. was moving too fast in implementing changes.[9] In addition, although the company had claimed that it could manage the schools with funding equal to the cost of the direct operation of the schools by Baltimore City Public Schools, in fact, E.A.I. negotiated an additional 2.7 million dollars per year beyond what the schools would have ordinarily received.[10] Moreover, the decision to replace paraprofessionals with college interns did not sit well with some.

By the end of the first year, however, reports of E.A.I.'s management cited evidence of increasingly productive relations with the school's constituencies as staff and parents adjusted to new expectations and leadership at the school level. Throughout the year, teachers had met every Wednesday afternoon from 1:00 until 2:45 for professional development and had visited exemplary middle schools to gain exposure to new practices. Moreover, during the year, perhaps in response to a decline in the school's attendance rate, the district had replaced Harlem Park's principal with another so well known for his leadership skills that one community activist remarked, "You'll see the school getting better now, but it won't be because of Tesseract. It will be because of [the new principal] Wyatt Coger." By the year's end, teachers were formulating plans to divide the school into distinct clusters, each with its own theme, beginning in Fall 1993.

Mae Gaskins, Project Director for E.A.I. in Baltimore explains that Harlem Park has set goals for improvement in the areas of safety, parent involvement, and inclusion of students with disabilities. In addition, she notes that school reform at Harlem Park is taking place in the context of the state's reform goals and that data gathered at the end of the 1992-1993 school year will serve as a baseline for measuring progress in student achievement and attendance in subsequent years. E.A.I. will issue reports based on these quantitative data every year until the end of its contract; it will also release a "process

evaluation" report at the end of July 1993. These reports will be the basis for accountability under the terms of the E.A.I. contract. As E.A.I.'s chairman John Golle says, "There will be dramatic educational gains and cleaner facilities with better trained teachers using more technology, or you kick us out!"[11]

Channel One

Another of Baltimore's privately-sponsored programs is Channel One, a 12-minute daily news program shown in all middle schools. The show, which currently contains four minutes of news, six minutes of human interest stories, and two minutes of commercials, is produced by Whittle Communications, a Tennessee-based company known for its entrepreneurial ventures into public education. In exchange for the district's agreeing that Baltimore students will watch the show every day, Whittle lends two videotape machines to each school and one television to each classroom.

While surveys show that students and teachers generally like the show and are pleased to have equipment they would not have had otherwise, not all of Baltimore's school constituents are satisfied with Channel One. For example, in January 1993, the School Board rejected a request from parents, churches, and community members to hold a public hearing on the project, which some reason results in time lost from classroom teaching with no gain for student learning. Objections to Channel One based on the belief that school is not the place to subject students to

television advertising may increase if recent efforts to expand commercial time within the 12-minute program are successful.[12]

Local Public-Private School Partnerships

In addition to the more publicized ventures of the private sector into Baltimore middle grades schools, one partnership between one of the city's private K-5 schools and the Barclay School, a K-8 Baltimore School, points the way to another kind of private-sector involvement. This partnership, approved by teachers and parents at Barclay, provides for phasing Calvert School's curriculum into the Barclay school grade by grade. With funds allocated to Calvert through the city's Abell Foundation, Barclay teachers train during the summer to become familiar with the school's structured, writing-based curriculum. During the school year, Barclay teachers receive mentoring and support from a Calvert teacher placed in the school full time. Although Calvert's curriculum extends only through fifth grade, the permanent presence of a mentor teacher will facilitate the extension of similar curriculum into Barclay's sixth, seventh, and eighth grades when the phase-in process reaches the middle level.

The extent to which additional arrangements like the Calvert-Barclay coupling develop may depend on the degree to which entities outside the public schools receive incentives to engage in such partnerships. Currently, the Abell Foundation is exploring a similar relationship between one of the city's

schools and Coppin State College, a Baltimore-based post-secondary institution known for its Saturday program in teaching thinking skills to youngsters from all over the state.

New American Schools Development Corporation

Since 1992, the New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC) has provided private funding for "break-the-mold" models of experience-based schooling nationwide. In Baltimore, one middle school currently participates in one of the efforts, the Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound Project. Prompted by the interest of the local Outward Bound Center, a January 1993 meeting with Expeditionary Learning, Superintendent Amprey and other Central Office staff, and community representatives, resulted in the district's selection of the Winston Middle School, a school of some 630 students, to join the Project. A letter of understanding between Expeditionary Learning and Baltimore City Public Schools formalizes the partnership between Winston and Expeditionary Learning and ensures that between February 1993 and June 1994, school staff will receive up to $30,000 of in-kind services and professional development, including on-site technical assistance, materials, and access to the Project's electronic mail system. At the same time, the district agrees to support staff transportation to the Project's Institutes in Dubuque, Iowa, and Boston, Massachusetts, and funding for substitutes when teachers are participating in professional development.

By May 1993, all of Winston's sixth grade teachers had attended several multi-day institutes designed to model how thematic, project-oriented learning, known as "expeditions," could take place in the classroom. In planning interdisciplinary activities, they continue to explore how teaching strategies can depart from such traditional practices as the focused teaching of test-taking skills. Phasing in new approaches grade by grade, beginning in the Fall of 1993, teachers will remain with their students for each subsequent year, designing new learning activities for the next year as they go along.

With sustained support from the Project, the partnership between the Winston and Expeditionary Learning both gains the leverage for change represented by access to private resources and connects the district, albeit somewhat tenuously, to a larger network that supports innovative pedagogy in the middle grades. Indeed, the uncertainty of NASDC's future funding and consequently of the continuity of technical assistance for Winston makes this link even more fragile and appears to put ongoing development of the expeditionary model at the school at some risk.

- Pressures Toward Entrepreneurial Schools: Promoting Decentralization from the Top Down

At the same time that private-sector involvement hints at pressures on the Central Office to release some of its control over individual schools, a recent management study of Baltimore City Public Schools has provided an added push toward a more

entrepreneurial model of schooling in the district. In June 1992, this study, funded by Baltimore's Associated Black Charities and the Abell Foundation, made waves when it called for a new management structure for the school district. The report, known as the Towers Perrin/Cresap Report recommended the establishment of "a network of enterprise schools," schools whose operations would rely on a school-based management model, with principals working with school teams through a shared decision-making process. As with Challenge Schools, principals and school teams would have responsibility for producing a strategic plan detailing outcomes, resource utilization, and support needs.

Basing its proposals on the assumption that greater autonomy at the school level would increase both teacher effectiveness and student achievement, the report also recommended that "Enterprise Schools" have the authority to manage all resources and make key decisions regarding staff and support services. Operating with greater independence from the Central Office, these schools will be able to purchase services from the Central Office so that:

> the growth or demise of central office units will be governed by school service demands. Specific areas to be considered initially for this concept are: resource allocation, human resources management, curriculum and instruction and facilities maintenance.[13]

With the formation of a district task force made up of school-based educators, Central Office staff, and community-based organizations, the district by the Spring of 1993 was poised to

consider plans submitted for Enterprise status. First, the district will select 25 schools for designation as Enterprise Schools during the 1993-94 school year, and district staff are now beginning to meet with school-level personnel to define next steps. Although the district expects that an additional 25 schools will be added annually to the network, it is not clear which of these at any point will be middle schools.

- An Alternative Vision: Teacher and Community Voices for "Bottom Up" Reform

While recommendations for decentralization through Enterprise Schools gained the attention of School Board Commissioners and district leadership during the 1992-93 school year, another push for decentralization was underway. This push, however, came not from well-financed management consultants but from a loosely-connected organization of teachers, parents, and citizens called The League for Educational Alternatives in Public Schools, also knows as "LEAPS AND BOUNDS."

LEAPS AND BOUNDS began in February 1992 with a small group of teachers, parents, and community representatives in Baltimore who had common concerns related to the quality of school climate and relationships relevant to teaching and learning in Baltimore City Schools. From these concerns sprang a campaign to obtain authorization from district leadership for teachers and citizens to design a number of new small schools that would be open to all students regardless of prior academic achievement or behavioral record and would operate within established attendance

boundaries. Despite an apparent lack of response from the Central Office or the Mayor, the group continued to design its program, and by autumn of 1992, had prepared three plans in detail. One of these proposed a small elementary school to teach basic skills through an arts-oriented curriculum. A second reflected interest of middle grades teachers to form a school-within-a-school at Roland Park Middle School. The third contemplated a project-based curriculum focusing on improving the environment of the racially-mixed neighborhood in the Memorial Stadium area. While teachers intended that this school would eventually enroll kindergarten through twelfth-graders, they hoped to open the first year with 100 students in grades 4 through 9. As a proposed public, teacher-directed school developed by a group of five teachers and about forty families in the Memorial Stadium area, this school is designed to meet all expected student outcomes outlines by the Maryland State Performance Assessment Plan.[14]

With these three proposals as "talking points," LEAPS AND BOUNDS sponsored three conferences in the fall of 1992, each attended by some 80 additional teachers, parents, and community members. Working with Baltimore's Community Planning and Housing Association, the group set up meetings with the city's political leaders to lobby for their proposals. Yet despite broad-based community support for their plans, only one, the school-within-a-school at Roland Park, which has support from that school's principal, seems to have potential for adoption in

the near future. In contrast, the Memorial Stadium Area-based school has been rejected by the Superintendent. Undaunted, the group intends to continue its campaign to start the school and work to establish policies to allow teachers and parents to found other schools, perhaps by lobbying to establish provisions for "charter schools" through state legislation.

Analyzing the need for such policies, one teacher notes:

> It's interesting that there's discussion of moving decision-making away from the center. But in the dynamics of the thing, the administration sees the principals as key, and they stop their decentralization at that level. We're suggesting they go beyond that level to include teachers, but it's difficult for them to figure out ways to hold so many people accountable.

The emergence of a grass-roots initiative with its own specific proposals for smaller, community-oriented schools, adds the voices of parents and teachers to the call for more school-based management and greater decentralization of the district's middle schools. Likewise, public resistance to a recent rezoning plan affecting elementary and middle schools may signal a view that more personalized, middle grades education could be key to successful outcomes for young adolescents in Baltimore.

Baltimore's Comprehensive Rezoning Plan, proposed in December 1992, would have closed one middle school and eliminated the middle grades from seven K-8 schools, resulting in increased numbers of students in 13 middle schools, with the goal of increasing individual middle school capacity to 2,400 students.[15]

After months of public debate and lobbying, however, the School Board rejected the original plan, approving instead a plan that would retain existing K-8 schools and introduce the K-8 concept at five additional elementary schools.[16] "Big middle schools just don't work," one teacher believes, apparently echoing sentiments more widely held than decision-makers had understood.

- University and Community-Based Supports for Students and Their Schools

Like many urban districts, Baltimore City Public Schools has, over the years, fostered a number of relationships with universities and community organizations to develop programs that serve students at all levels of schooling, including the middle grades. For example, institutions of post-secondary education contribute significant resources to expand opportunities for middle-level student success. One, the Johns Hopkins University, has worked with a number of Baltimore middle grades schools to implement parent involvement programs and such effective research-based language arts/cooperative learning programs as Student Team Reading/Student Team Writing, and the University's Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students will soon begin piloting its acclaimed Success for All Program, developed originally for elementary grades, in one middle school. At the same time, Baltimore City Community College has worked with two middle schools to develop Project SUCCESS, a program using financial incentives and support activities to motivate "C" students to stay in school and prepare

for college in their zoned high schools; and Morgan State University hosts middle grades students from Baltimore for a Saturday program to inform students about career opportunities in math, science, and computer technology and has sponsored Saturday morning staff development for middle level science teachers.

In addition, a variety of the city's community organizations have invested resources and attention to support programs in the middle grades. These include Project BRAVE, a peer mediation program of the Law Related Education Project; Project RAISE which links middle grades students with long-term mentors; Baltimore's Council on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting, and Pregnancy Prevention trains students in decision-making skills; the NAACP sponsors a tutoring and mentoring program; and "Magic Me" engages students in community service. The Boys and Girls Clubs, Outward Bound, and the American Friends Service Committee sponsor additional programs. Finally, professional organizations, the business community, and city departments like the Baltimore City Police Department contribute resources to expand opportunities available to middle grades youngsters in Baltimore.

Finally, one recent organizations on the "middle grades scene" is Students First, a student advocacy organization that is a project of Baltimore's Advocates for Children and Youth, which sponsors the Baltimore Middle School Reform Project. As part of this effort, Students First publishes "Word from the Middle," a regular newsletter distributed to all families of middle grades

students. Project staff also testify before the School Board on matters related to middle schools, convene focus groups for parents and citizens to guage concerns regarding the middle grades, distribute public information regarding new policies affecting middle grades students, and gather data documenting school performance. As a public watchdog group, Students First actively raises awareness in the city about the critical nature of schooling for young adolescents and provides information to all constituencies in support of middle school reform.

- A Climate for Change

Given the plethora of stakeholders involved in school affairs in Baltimore City and the wide range of programs and policy initiatives in place, the district offers an intriguing laboratory for districtwide middle grades reform. While each of the separate initiatives may have limited effect, the impact of these efforts taken together could exceed the sum of the parts. With state and district policies both fostering a mixture of approaches, the district's boundaries are rendered more fluid and open to influences generated in the wider arena of educational reform than in many urban districts.

If these initiatives draw from any common elements, they are a push for greater decentralization and autonomy of schools from Central Office and a cautious openness to experimentation within certain parameters. As one supporter reports, "This is a time of change, a 'let's try anything' time. We have to do what it

takes. We need to try lots of things." In this climate, the Institute for Middle Grades Reform will be both competing with and complementing a wide range of change-oriented efforts purporting to improve outcomes for young adolescent students.

The Baltimore City Institute for Middle School Reform: Building A Belief System for Improved Learning

Any district-level reform venture must have a vision that weaves disparate elements together into a whole cloth. That vision for the Baltimore City Institute for Middle School Reform is shaped by the fundamental belief that all students will learn at high levels. By adopting the principles of learning articulated by Dr. Jeffrey Howard of the Efficacy Institute, a non-profit educational training and consulting firm that specializes in working in districts with large numbers of African-American students, the district is committing itself to four outcomes for graduating students. These outcomes contemplate that all students leaving twelfth grade will do basic calculus, speak a second language, write a 25-page research paper, and create an artistic product.

In tandem with Efficacy principles, BCPS has embraced a staff development/curriculum planning framework developed by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development called "Dimensions of Learning." Developed by Robert Marzano and Debra Pickering of the Mid-continent Regional Laboratory, the program is based on cognitive research which outlines five kinds of thinking that underlie meaningful learning and allow students to

pose and solve problems and apply knowledge. These "dimensions of learning" posit that learning must first address students' and teachers' attitudes and perceptions. Students must then engage in acquiring and integrating knowledge, in extending and refining this knowledge, and, finally, in using knowledge in meaningful ways to make decisions, investigate, and solve problems. Teaching must also help students develop learning habits that make their learning more efficient.

These conceptual cornerstones anchor both professional development and curriculum development affecting middle grades teaching and learning. Thus, under the umbrella of the Institute for Middle School Reform, all district employees at Central Office and at each school will receive training in Efficacy principles. Likewise, teachers working in the Office of Curriculum Development with Sara Duff, the Coordinator of Curriculum for the Early Adolescent Years, are guided in their development of new curricular units by both Efficacy principles and the kinds of learning outlined in the Marzano-Pickering/ASCD program.

Added to this conceptual framework are Guiding Principles for Middle Schools developed by teacher liaisons from each middle school. Still under discussion in May 1993, early drafts of these principles call on Baltimore's middle schools to:

1. Utilize various data to continually evaluate middle school programs and services.

pose and solve problems and apply knowledge. These "dimensions of learning" posit that learning must first address students' and teachers' attitudes and perceptions. Students must then engage in acquiring and integrating knowledge, in extending and refining this knowledge, and, finally, in using knowledge in meaningful ways to make decisions, investigate, and solve problems. Teaching must also help students develop learning habits that make their learning more efficient.

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Added to this conceptual framework are Guiding Principles for Middle Schools developed by teacher liaisons from each middle school. Still under discussion in May 1993, early drafts of these principles call on Baltimore's middle schools to:

1. Utilize various data to continually evaluate middle school programs and services.

2. Implement diversified programs that reflect the developmental differences in young adolescents.

3. Provide a nurturing environment that addresses the unique academic, career, social, physical and emotional needs of the urban adolescent.

4. Involve families as active partners in the middle school program and in the student's learning process.

5. Provide students with active learning experiences that promote higher order thinking skills.

6. Ensure that students experience success in, and the responsibility for, their academic and personal endeavors.

7. Provide continuous staff development to assist teachers in meeting the needs of each middle school's unique populations.

8. Develop working partnerships with all components of the school community, focusing on, but not limited to, community service learning experiences for students.

9. Infuse the concept of physical, social, and emotinal wellness in all aspects of the middle schools program.

10. Incorporate the use and application of technology in all facets of instruction and school management, where applicable.

11. Assure that the mission, goals, philosophy, and instructional programs in each school are understood and practiced by all parties.[17]

All school principals have received these guidelines which teacher liaisons have developed for discussion and comments. Eventually, these guidelines will drive the school-level organizational, curricular, and instructional reforms of the Institute.

Tiers of Intervention: A Multi-Level Strategy for Reform

While many policy initiatives frequently treat schools as if they were alike and as if they respond to the same type and intensity of intervention, the Institute recognizes that different schools are at different stages of development, have varying needs, and require diverse levels of engagement. Alert to such differences, the Institute contemplates a multi-faceted strategy to involve all schools in improvement efforts while providing focused attention and resources to eighteen schools deemed in greatest need of reform.

- Providing a Foundation of Support for All Schools: Tier I

Key to the overall initiative is the commitment of district leadership to make available to every Baltimore middle grades school significant new resources. Each school now operates within a framework for expectations about student achievement and receives an extra staff position for a teacher liaison who is available as a partner to each princial for implementing curriculum objectives and strengthening teaching and learning at each school. The Institute also offers incentive grants for teacher-designed programs to teams of teachers at every middle school, on-going staff development, and a newsletter informing teachers of school-based innovations and districtwide opportunities.

Professional Development

At the core of the Institute's various activities is an extensive program of professional development that is designed to touch all departments of the district. Indeed, the Institite for Middle School Reform is one spoke of larger "wheel" of special district initiatives. At the hub of this wheel are four professional academies, one each for school executives, teachers, related services professionals, and support professionals. In turn, each of these academies is defined by a commitment to continuous improvement grounded in research-based assessments and Efficacy principles.

This structure emphasizes once again the importance of Efficacy in guiding all aspects of the Institute's work. Consequently, the district's professional development strategy focuses on shifting the mindset of all district employees toward Efficacy principles. As Dr. Patricia White, Assistant Superintendent for Professional Development, Organizational Development, and Attitudinal Change, explains, "We are including everyone in the system in our efforts in order to lay the foundation for good academic achievement for students."

With an additional budget allocation of one million dollars in city funds and support from the Baltimore Gas and Electric Company, White and her staff have drawn up a plan to include everyone concerned with middle grades students in Baltimore. Beginning with intensive consciousness raising for key community

stakeholders, which participants describe as "inspiring," "exhausting," and "encouraging about the possibilities," training has extended to Central Office staff, all principals, and individuals who serve on the district's "Professional Development Cadre" whose members are responsible for training staff at their schools. Additional aspects of the overall training strategy include networking with all principals and assessing both individual and school-focused professional development profiles to determine needs for future staff and organizational training.

All of these activities are brought together under the umbrella of the Middle School Reform Institute. For example, principals meet on a regular basis to develop skills in organizational change, with technical assistance provided by both Central Office staff and consultant Robby Champion. Likewise, the on-going Academies include activities relevant to the middle grades including such workshops as "Interdisciplinary Instruction," "The Explicit Teaching of Higher Order Thinking Skills," "Cooperative Learning," and "Infusion of African-American Perspectives into Classroom Instruction." Finally, the presence of teacher liaisons serving as school-based change agents ensure that professional learning will become part of daily life in each middle school.

Curriculum Reorganization

Key to improved student outcomes in Baltimore is the upgrading of curriculum available to all middle school students.

Guided by the conceptual understandings of Efficacy and Dimensions for Learning and shaped by conversations with business and community residents around the question "What kinds of students do we want when they graduate?", the Office for Curriculum and Instruction is developing expected learning outcomes for all Baltimore students. These outcomes will drive new curricular frameworks reflected in an instructional sequence proposed for the middle grades:

GRADE 6

Integrated Language Arts
Second Language
Advanced Mathematics
Hands-on Science
Career Exploration/Computer Studies
Character and Citizenship
Fine Arts
Wellness/Health/Fitness

GRADE 7

Integrated Language Arts
Second Language
Pre-Algebra
Life Science
Fine Arts
Career Exploration/Computer Studies
Character and Citizenship
Wellness/Health/Fitness

GRADE 8

Literature and Composition
Second Language
Algebra
Earth Science
Fine Arts
Career Choices/Computer Studies
Character and Citizenship
Wellness/Health/Fitness

Specific curicular units with the flexibility to address students' individual learning styles will provide teachers with the means to deliver this instructional sequence. In addition, new technological resources, the Baltimore Electronic Resources Recommended for Instruction, also known as BERRI, will make these units easily accessible to all middle grades teachers.

BERRI represents Baltimore's curriculum technologically driven via a computer system. Curricular units themselves reflect the Maryland School Performance Program expected outcomes for eighth graders in academic subjects and are keyed to competencies and performance objectives listed in Baltimore City Public Schools' Curriculum Scope and Sequence. For each six-week unit, a set of BERRI Data Cards describe learning activities in terms of their objectives, and in some cases teachers may choose among four or five different activities to reach a given learning objective. Data cards also highlight potential connections with other subject areas to facilitate interdisciplinary curriculum development. Teachers seeking specific activities can open "resource drawers" where they find materials needed for learning, including fact sheets and graphics for overhead transparencies. Further, every lesson includes multicultural activities and allow teachers to individualize learning for students with disabilities.

"The beauty of this is that it is an interactive piece; when teachers develop a unit, it can be authored, it can be changed,"

says Dr. Maurice Howard, BCPS Director of Curriculum. With connections to laser disk technology, telecommunications, word processing, and graphics programs, "teachers can modify, manipulate, and do all kinds of things to develop a curriculum document," he notes. Dr. Patricia White, Assistant Superintendent for Professional Development adds:

> We have to make sure that all children will be taught the same thing. I think BERRI will support this goal. On top of that, it will allow teachers to be more creative, flexible, and include lessons generated by their students.

BERRI also represents potential for disseminating positive practices developed at some schools to all schools. For example, teachers at Calverton and West Baltimore Middle Schools have contributed the homework activities created through the "Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork Process (TIPS)" to the system, and "file drawers" will include these activities in sixth grade language arts and science/health. The system will also include a Teachers Manual critical to implementing TIPS and blank forms so that teachers can design their own TIPS activities and enter them into the system for replication or adaptation by others.

Although seventh and eighth grade units are not expected to be ready until September of 1993, the BCPS Office of Curriculum and Instruction will have developed most of the sixth grade units by the end June 1993, and every sixth grade teacher will have his or her own computer available to access the BERRI system. As is often the case when a Central Office sets out to provide new

resources while also encouraging implementation that is sensitive to conditions at each school, use of BERRI in its early stages varies from school to school. For example, in one middle school, computers for sixth grade teachers are located in one room to be used as a "lab." In another, every sixth grade teacher has a computer in his or her classroom. Likewise, teachers' familiarity with computer technology is inevitably different from one school to the next, necessitating different levels of technical assistance and support to enhance the likelihood that teachers will use the system well.

Teacher Liaisons

To ensure that the reform movement is relevant to local school needs, the Institute coordinates "Institute teacher liaisons," a new position allocated at each middle grades school. Selected by and accountable to each principal and the school improvement team, the liaison works as an in-school change agent, assisting teachers and school improvement teams with new curriculum and the reform process. Liaisons also collect and prepare articles for inclusion in the quarterly newsletter "In the Middle," plan professional development activities, and write proposals for mini-grants for their schools.

With expectations that they will become school-based experts on middle grades reform, liaisons meet monthly to develop knowledge and skills for school change. Over several meetings during the school year 1992-93, for example, they reviewed

Turning Points as a basis for a discussion on the topic "What should your middle school be like?" They also heard from small work groups that recommended increasing time allocated to professional development and developed ten "Guiding Principles for Middle Schools." An "Institute Notebook" contains materials from these meetings so that liaisons will have tools for use in their own schools.

As often occurs at the beginning of any new project, staff admit to some "confusion" over the responsibilities and roles of teacher liaisons. Thus, during the trial year of the project, one third of the middle schools had full-time liaisons with no classroom responsibilities; others continued to assign liaisons to classrooms, while providing only one extra planning period each day. This confusion apparently arose because although the district gave all schools an extra position for the year, it was not clear that schools were to use it for the Institute liaison. Likewise, while some liaisons understand their position to be one of relieving colleagues of "extra" responsibilities so that they can focus on teaching children, others see themselves in the role of change agent/innovator responsible for engaging teachers in school and classroom assessment processes. The finalization of a job description for Institute liaison should clarify this ambiguity.

By providing professional development to all schools, redesigning curriculum, and funding an in-school change-agent

postion, the Institute has established an infrastructure for middle school change in Baltimore City Public Schools. These ingredients form a foundation for implementing deeper and more extensive assessment and school reform strategies offered to "Tier II" and "Tier III" schools.

- A School-Based Assessment and Planning Process: A "Tier II" Strategy

In addition to recognizing that reform must develop from a sound base of curricular objectives and that such reform requires support to make those objectives real in classrooms, the Institute's activities also rest on an understanding that some schools need greater intensity of intervention. These are known as "Tier II schools."[18]

Over the next several years, Tier II schools will engage in a school improvement process based on a school-site plan that principals develop with their school improvement teams. This planning process will be grounded in several types of technical assistance and professional development provided by the district. First, teams will discuss the process of change, expectations, and accountability in full-day planning sessions with the district's consultant for school change, Dr. Robby Champion, and a member of the steering committee, Dr. Marvin Cohen of Bank Street College of Education. In addition, support from the BCPS general education fund will allow each school to conduct a school-based assessment. Further staff development for teams will focus on analyzing the data collected, developing skills for

shared decision-making, and consensus-building. Based on assessment findings, teams will finally develop school improvement plans for the period beginning in February 1994 with funds available from state Challenge Grants and Baltimore's Fund for Educational Excellence.

- Tier III: Challenge Schools

Finally, although the establishment of the Institute reflects a commitment to provide technical assistance for improvement to all Baltimore middle grades schools, one group of schools is eligible for special help through the state's Challenge Schools program. Although the state initially pressed Baltimore to designate only elementary schools as Challenge Schools, Dr. Gonzalez argued that "the period of early adolescence is the last best opportunity for intervening in the lives of youngsters," and persuaded the state that twelve Baltimore City Middle Schools should be part of this initiative. These schools constitute Tier III schools within the framework of the Institute and will receive support from both the state and the district.[19]

Like Tier II schools, Challenge/Tier III schools engage in a planning process that results in a school-based plan for change. However, these schools follow a process specified by the state, with initial assessments conducted by external review teams, including community members. Assessments follow a battery of interviews, surveys, qualitative data, and observations designed

by the Maryland Department of Education and based on school effectiveness qualities. After external review teams report to the school, site-based teams work with state-assigned facilitators to develop their own plan for improvement and identify resources to implement that plan.

As part of this process, by Spring of 1993, three middle schools - Herring Run, Booker T. Washington, and Benjamin Franklin - were working directly with experienced change agents from the Center for Educational Innovation (CEI). According to Seymour Fliegel of CEI, facilitators will eventually work closely with principals and teachers from all Challenge Schools to answer questions regarding external review team reports and fashion plans that address the reports' findings. "We get them thinking. If they don't have a vision, we push them to develop one. We get them to take ownership of their own renewal process," explains Fliegel. He adds that Maryland's expected outcomes offer an important context for the work of renewal: "The goals you hold fast to. The strategies will vary," he notes.

District-level assistance through the Institute supplements state support for Baltimore's Challenge Schools. Like other schools, Challenge Schools benefit from professional development opportunities for staff, new technological resources, and the position of Institute liaison teacher, and they must operate within curricular frameworks developed by the district's Office of Curriculum and Instruction. If these schools, as designated

Challenge Schools, operate under the most stringent oversight, they also appear to have both the greatest opportunities and most significant resources for reform.

- Demonstration Middle School

The final component of the Institute is one demonstration middle school expected to open in some form in September 1993. Although the outlines of the school are only beginning to take shape, advisors do not have a single model in mind but note that even if the school opens with only a small sixth grade, it will be "a place where there are strong teachers trying new and different things." Moreover, they stress that such strategies "have to be homegrown." They also hope that affiliations with local teacher preparation programs will engage a diversity of people, including student teachers, in the development of the school's identity and make it a place alive with ideas and hospitable to risk-taking.

Supporters of the demonstration school admit that they are only just beginning to clarify the extent to which the school will offer a laboratory experience for training teachers or create a place for cutting-edge educational experiments. Yet even in its conceptual stages, the proposal wins support from observers outside of Central Office, and the school's preliminary approval as a program that can offer credit for teacher certification provides a solid start for further development.

Organizational Structure of the Institute

As an administrative structure within BCPS, the Baltimore City Institute for Middle School Reform is "housed" in the Office for Curriculum and Instruction, where Deputy Superintendent Dr. Lillian Gonzalez can marshall the district's human and fiscal resources for improved middle school instruction and outcomes. According to Gonzalez, all departments will be using some of their money for middle school reform to support the district's "recipe for change." Essential ingredients Gonzalez cites for Baltimore's recipe include recognition of a problem; commitment from the "top," "bottom," and "major stakeholders;" a "gimmick" to sell the concept; a clear image of success; and access to new knowledge and colleagues. Most critical, however, says Gonzalez, is a mechanism for involving all the schools. "How do you move 30 schools to where you want to be?" she asks. "If you don't keep everyone in the loop, everyone excited, you won't be able to reach every school."

With only one staff person assigned to work specifically on the Institute, the project is also aided by a steering/advisory committee consisting of, in the words of one member, "mostly people from Baltimore who ought to be concerned about the schools" - middle school teachers and principals, Central Office staff, and members of the university and business communities including the Greater Baltimore Committee, the Private Industry Council, Educational Alternatives, Inc., the University of

Maryland, the Johns Hopkins University, Morgan State University, and Bank Street College of Education.

The responsibility of the steering committee is to review the activities of the Institute to see that they reflect the most current research on systemic reform in the middle grades. As a sounding board for new ideas, the committee plays the role of "critical friend" to the Institute, and the group operates as a reality-testing, strategizing, and task-oriented entity. As one member attests:

> It's nice because although the Greater Baltimore Committee and the Private Industry Council are there, there aren't any real funders so you don't have to put on a show. We can just talk about how we can bring the resources of the community together for middle school students.

The committee may also serve to attract resources and bring people together who might not otherwise unite behind one focused project. For example, notes one participant:

> People on the committee can network in effective ways, not just for money but to set up internships or identify mentors for students. They can create a positive 'buzz' around the business community, the university community.

The Institute's location in a district department that can mobilize resources, together with the formal support of prestigious "outside" constituencies distinguishes the Institute as an administrative vehicle for change. Indeed, the Institute does not represent additional regulatory demands on educators, nor does it add another layer to a centralized bureaucracy. Rather, the Institute reflects the commitment of a Central Office

to establish a favorable policy context for change while providing individual schools with resources and skills they can use to develop their own means of realizing improved outcomes for students. In this sense, it is a symbol of a new relationship between the Central Office and the district's middle schools. As one steering committee member explains:

> Middle grades students and schools all over the country are underserved. Symbols matter. The Institute is an important symbol that says, 'We are going to focus on you. We are going to help you.'"

The strategy for helping is represented by a multi-dimensional approach to change that positions Central Office leadership and the resource development it effects in the service of improved student outcomes.

Funding

The Middle School Institute derives support from multiple sources, both public and private. For example, Baltimore's School Board of Commissioners has allocated several million dollars for professional development and teacher liaisons, and another four million dollars for the development and technology associated with new middle grades curriculum and the BERRI system. The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Baltimore's Fund for Educational Excellence, and the Enterprise Foundation have also contributed funding toward the effort. Moreover, the district may mobilize additional funding through regular funding streams. For example, state compensatory education funds may support summer programs for middle grades students. Finally,

considerable additional funds and support that do not accrue to the Institute itself but benefit schools directly, including Challenge Grants, will serve the Institute's overriding goals of improving instruction and student achievement at the middle level.

A Commitment to Common Outcomes Through Flexible Means

The diversity of approaches to reforming Baltimore's middle schools clearly reflects a realistic assessment that different schools are at different stages of development. This assessment points to a need for differential treatment of schools by Central Office, with schools allowed as much flexibility as possible for choosing the means through which they will achieve improved student outcomes. "We want to see all schools effective, but we're not married to any one model," reports one advisor.

At the same time, Dr. Gonzalez emphasizes that success requires an overall strategy that assumes focused leadership from the top. Her formula: "Create conditions for change. Establish expectations. Encourage experimentation. Reward Improvements. You must have these or you will not be successful," she asserts.

The Institute finally represents a shift in the relationship between Baltimore's middle schools and the Central Office as the latter develops its role as capacity builder and provider of technical assistance for schools within a particular framework of expectations for student achievement. As Willie Foster notes, "We recognize that Central Office has a role to play as

facilitator, supporter, and service provider to schools engaged in a school-based decision-making process." This partnership between the Central Office and schools reflects both the philosophy and the intervention strategy for change developed by the Institute. As one steering committee member explains:

> It's really a sensible balance of "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches. The top is setting the policy and tone for reform but letting the schools chart their own course. As long as the bureaucracy becomes a support system for schools and a vehicle to develop resources that wouldn't be there otherwise, this can work.

Predictions for the Future and Next Steps

The school year 1992-93 marked only a beginning in the expected lifespan of Baltimore's Institute for Middle School Reform. These first months have been a time for planning, gathering resources, and defining roles and responsibilities. Notes one steering committee member, "It's a great advance from over a year ago, [but] it's a little early to expect to report on any progress."

Yet even in these initial stages of the Institute, observers in Baltimore give the project's potential for success anywhere between "even" and "2-1" odds. In their support, they cite the focus that new leadership brings to the effort and the wisdom of the three-tiered intervention strategy. Those who have been exposed to the Efficacy Institute's training, both inside and outside the School Department, report that the experience has energized their work and strengthened their understanding of how all student can learn. One principal lauds Efficacy for its

effect in challenging and changing long-held beliefs and attitudes.

The Institute generates special excitement among those who have waited many years for renewed attention to the needs of young adolescents. Notes one long-time observer:

> In relation to middle schools systemwide, the last real effort for reform was 20 years ago when these schools changed over from junior high schools. This is very different. Staff development is a key focus; the superintendent is in the lead. This is a district that has a good idea of what it needs to do.

In the minds of other observers, the Institute's greatest potential lies in the role it can play in disseminating the district's most promising practices and helping educators who work in the schools every day identify positive strategies that they can adapt in their own schools to enrich learning and teaching. Says one observer, "Eventually, schools that are restructuring should see the Institute as a resource for doing a better job." However, the Institute will need to develop this potential explicitly. As another observer notes:

> The system has not yet figured out how we can learn from one another. The district needs to collect the best ideas from inside and make the Institute a mechanism for schools to learn about them and borrow from each other.

In fact, the strengths already in the system signal to several observers the potential for the Institute to build on a foundation for positive change. Reports one steering committee member:

> There are a bunch of very good people willing to take on new challenges. Close to half of the middle schools have very good leadership. They are ready to try new things. Our job is to help the more ambitious schools try more experimental practices, get each school to volunteer to take on one particular piece, then get them to learn from each other.

Others venture specific predictions about how the Institute will realize opportunities for improved teaching and learning. Foster states clearly, "We envision that in three to five years, we will see improvements in instruction, management, and student success as measured by standardized tests." Another steering committee member elaborates:

> In five years time, I think you'll see a working demonstration school. Lots of individual teachers in all schools will be doing things they never thought of doing before. Tier II schools will be doing new things.

At the same time, supporters also raise concerns that would surface in any large urban district undertaking a major new policy initiative. For example, one supporter wonders how to ensure that the attention paid to "process" will actually result in improved curriculum and instruction in the classroom, noting that it is one thing to focus on attitude change, but that that change must be backed up with specific learning activities. "Right now, a lot of it is betting on the process. We can't let that focus obscure the need for concrete activities for better learning and teaching," this participant asserts.

Others involved have begun to wonder how they will know how successful the Institute has been, and several have identified the need for an evaluattion plan. These concerns acknowledge

that the ultimate test of the Institute's initiatives will be the extent to which they result in improved student performance. The Maryland State Performance Assessment Plan suggests a clear framework for such an evaluation.

If, as one observer notes, the Institute stands now only "at a point of high potential," unanswered questions ultimately come down to one: "Will this enormous potential be realized?" This question emerges from observers' uncertainty about the breadth of community support, adequacy of resources to realize the Institute's mission, and availability of meaningful ways to determine how well the Institute is working. For example, some ask:

- Will the district be able to communicate the vision and goals of the Institute to all stakeholders, especially school principals? Do district staff and School Board Commissioners really understand how to communicate complicated policy matters to the community?
- Will the schools ensure that the "right people" are involved? ("You don't buy an idea if you feel you've been shut out," said one close observer.)
- Can the district acknowledge the best of school changes already in place and develop within-district expertise for reform without fostering divisiveness among schools?
- Will the district have enough resources to implement all the activities proposed for the Institute?
- Can the administrative team remain focused in the face of competing demands?
- Will school renewal focus on controversial and difficult issues like high rates of student suspensions and rigid tracking that are not identified through the Maryland report cards?

- How can you evaluate the impact of the Institute while acknowledging that relying on standardized tests alone could be a disaster?

- Will the reform initiative represented by the Institute be broad and flexible enough to incorporate more teacher-initiated, "bottom-up" reform?

As a work-in-progress, Baltimore's Institute for Middle School Reform is best seen as an evolving venture that will move ahead as fast or as slowly as the district's and community's understanding of, commitment to, and resources and tools for implementing school change will allow. Summarizes one steering committee member:

> Right now, the Institute is a serious commitment from Central Office to make middle school reform a districtwide imperative. Now it's the 'nitty gritty' of getting schools to adopt new lessons, new ways of doing things that's the challenge."

1 The Baltimore City Institute for Middle School Reform: A Progress Report: School Year 1992-1993," p. 1.

2 Some on the State Board of Education believe that the state should equalize resources among schools and districts before introducing accountability measures. See Maushard, Mary, "State ponders 'challenging' school goals," The Evening Sun (Baltimore, MD), 26 May 1993, p. 1B. See also Mary Maushard, "State wants more authority in schools," The Evening Sun (Baltimore, MD), 27 May 1993.

3 "An Act Concerning State Aid for Public Education - Schools for Success," Maryland House Bill No. 874.

4 "Features of Challenge Schools' Program," Presented to State Board of Education, August 18, 1992; Maryland School Performace Program, "Maryland State Department of Education Guidelines for School Improvement Teams in Challenge Schools," Presented to Maryland State Board, August 18, 1992.

5 Another example of state-district collaboration is represented by Baltimore's Canton Middle School, a designated dropout prevention middle school participating in Maryland Tomorrow, a project of the Maryland Department of Education's Carnegie Initiative.

6 Sandy Banisky, "Agressive Abell Foundation puts its mark on city: From Norplant to schools it influences social policy," Baltimore Sun, 7 February 1993, p. 1A.

7 "Some Lessons Learned about Middle School Change in the Baltimore City Public Schools Edna McConnell Clark Foundation Project," August 1992.

8 See, for example, Peter Schmidt, "Employees Protest Firm's Tactics at Baltimore Schools," Education Week, 16 September 1992, p. 1; and Mark Bomster, "Teachers' union pans privatization effort," Baltimore Evening Sun, March 31, 1993.

9 Peter Schmidt, "Management Firm Finds Schools a Tough Sell," Education Week, 14 October 1992, p. 1, 13-14.

10 Barbara Miner, "Education for Sale: For-Profit Firms Target Public Schools," Rethinking Schools, Vol. 7, No. 4, Summer 1993, p. 1, 14-17.

11 Interview with John Golle, Chairman, Educational Alternatives, Inc., "Marketplace," National Public Radio, 8 June 1993.

12 See, for example, Mark Walsh, "Whittle To Ask To Exceed Daily Limit of 2 Minutes for Ads on Channel One," Education Week, 2 June 1993, p. 4.

13 Baltimore City Public Schools, "A Network of Enterprise Schools: Summary of Task Force Report, ND.

14 "Proposal for a Public, Teacher-directed Community School in the Memorial Stadium Area," (Draft for Comments and Suggestions), March 1993.

15 Students First, "WHAT IT MEANS to Baltimore's students and families: The Comprehensive Rezoning Plan proposed by the Baltimore City Public Schools," February 1993.

16 Mark Bomster, "Board OKs city school rezoning," Baltimore Evening Sun, April 2, 1993.

17 Guiding Principles Group, Baltimore City Institute for Middle School Reform, "Revision of: Guiding Principles for Middle Schools," ND.

18 These schools include West Baltimore, Calverton, Francis Scott Key, Winston, Lemmel, and Southeast Middle Schools.

19 These schools include Robert Poole, Greenspring, Booker T. Washington, Hampstead Hill, Diggs Johnson, Benjamin Franklin, Canton, Lombard, Pimlico, Herring Run, Dunbar, and Arnett J. Brown Middle Schools.